

# **DATA ON EXIT EXAMS AND DIPLOMAS**

This document contains information Sen. Stephenson recently received from Jennifer Dounay, Policy Analyst with the Education Commission of the States, via email. His questions, and Jennifer's answers, appear below, followed by additional data that Jennifer supplied:

**Q1:** Do you have additional information regarding the "stakes" that are being enforced in each state? For example, for students who fail to pass the test by the end of 12th grade - how many states prohibit them from receiving a diploma?

**A1:** In the 26 states that have or will have exit exams, none of the states awards a diploma to a student who fails the exam. If a student reaches the end of grade 12 without having passed the exam, the only option is for the student to continue to re-take the exam, in the 20 states that do or will allow this option.

**Q2:** Are they allowed to attend graduation with their peer and receive a "Certificate of Completion" in lieu of a diploma?

**A2:** I think in some states it's a district decision whether the student will attend graduation with their peers, but yes, those students who do not pass the exit exam receive a "certificate of attendance" or "certificate of completion" at the end of grade 12.

**Q3:** Utah's State School Board is proposing to allow all students who have attempted the test at least three times and failed, to still receive a full diploma. It has been suggested that we change the law to lower the bar to allow all students to receive the diploma who have fulfilled the course credit requirements and for those who pass the basic skills test, to award an "added value" diploma which would indicate they passed. Those who failed to pass the test would have no designation on their diploma or transcript.

Some have argued that some kids just don't test well and if they have completed the coursework with passing grades, they should get a diploma. Others respond by pointing out that some kids have different skill sets. Some students who don't have the basic skills in math, reading, and writing still get good grades in their classes because their skills are more interpersonal and task-completion oriented rather than academic-skills oriented.

Please help me to understand how many states are sticking with their high stakes diploma and how many are backing off.

**A3:** A number of states have approved delays in implementing exit exams, but we've seen very little backing off altogether. HI used to have an exit exam but did away with it years ago in order to develop a new exam better aligned with the state standards--but has yet to publicly approve a new exam. In 2001 or early 2002 WI was talking about implementing an exit exam but I think due to budgetary restrictions decided not to move forward with the idea.

### **Delays in implementing exit exams:**

AL: started phasing in tests in 2002 rather than 2001 as initially planned; state board voted fall 2002 to delay social studies portion of exit exam till Class of 2004

AK: Delayed exit exam from Class of 2002 to Class of 2004

AZ: Delayed exit exam from Class of 2004 to Class of 2006

CA: Delayed exit exam from Class of 2004 to Class of 2006

NC: I believe they had a minimum competency exam that they wished to replace with a more challenging exam. Delayed first year of more challenging exam from Class of 2003 to Class of 2004

OH: From Class of 2001 to Class of 2007

OK: 2000 legislation delayed implementation of the end-of-instruction tests in Biology I and Algebra I until the 2002-2003 school year.

WA: From Class of 2006 to Class of 2008

My understanding is that these delays were implemented because of low student test scores attributed to insufficient time to: prepare teachers for content of exams, provide remediation and other supports to struggling students, better align content with grade-level expectations (i.e., AZ's first take at the math exam included geometry, which students had not completed in grade 10 when they were taking the exam), and prepare curriculum earlier in the K-12 pipeline so that students were ready for exam content by grade 10 or 11 when they'd be taking the exam.

### **Other changes to states' exit exam policies:**

MA initially wanted to have world history as part of their exit exam but backed off (exit exam currently covers reading and math).

DE was to have an exit exam--students would have their scores on reading, writing, math and science assts. averaged and weighted to come up with a "diploma index" (so that, for example, someone who was strong in math but weak in writing or vice versa could compensate by scoring well in their strong subject area). However, this idea was so publicly unpopular that a third diploma option, a "basic" diploma was added, so that kids who scored below the threshold on the diploma index would still receive a high school diploma. Then in the 2005 legislative session, the 3-tiered diploma system was

completely done away with, eff. Class of 2008 (so that those high school students who had already taken exams would not be affected). In other words, effective with the Class of 2008, there will be just one diploma available for DE high school students.

MI got a lot of pushback a few years (or more?) ago when they talked about making their high school exams exit exams. They compromised by allowing districts to decide whether or not to use the 11th grade assessments as an exit exam--but am not sure if that is still on the table with the new high school exams they are going to be implementing (that is, I don't know if districts will have the option of making the exams exit exams or if there will statewide be no exit exams).

### **Other Diplomas/Endorsements:**

Some states do offer an honors or college-prep diploma or endorsement to students who attain sufficiently high scores on state assessments--assessments that are either exit exams or plain old state tests. . . the following states award such diplomas or endorsements based on state asst. scores:

CA: Golden State Seal Merit Diploma (this program precedes the state exit exam, which goes in effect eff. Class of 2006)

DE: temporary

MA: Certificate of Mastery (high enough score on exit exam)

NY: 3 options: Regents diploma with honors, Regents diploma with advanced designation with honors, and Regents diploma with advanced designation (tied to exit exam scores)

PA: Certificate of Proficiency and Certificate of Distinction (does not have exit exam)

VA: Advanced Studies Diploma (has exit exam)

WA: "Scholar designation" on transcript (I believe this designation is available now though the state asst. will not be an exit exam till the Class of 2008)

WY: Advanced Endorsement (does not have exit exam)

In addition, IN, KY, LA, MO, TX award honors diplomas, one of the qualifiers for which is a benchmark score on a non-state exam (AP, SAT or ACT, etc.) Those details are also in the database link above.

### **States that require students to pass an exit exam to receive a high school diploma, and how states are addressing failure to pass the test:**

19 states had exit exams in 2005: AL, AK, FL, GA, IN, LA, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX and VA. Besides Utah, an additional 7 states will be phasing in exit exams between 2006 and 2012: AZ (2006), AR (2010), CA, 2006, ID (2006), MD (2009), OK (2012) and WA (2008).

For **general education students** who fail exit exams, states are providing a variety of options. These numbers refer to both the 19 that had exit exams last year and those implementing, though totals = 25 since the CEP report missed AR in their 2005 assessment (legislation creating their 2010 exit exam was just enacted in 2005 legislative session):

- a.. Retesting: 25 states
- b.. Retesting after grade 12: 20 states
- c.. Reciprocity with other states (students who have passed exam in state A but moved to state B and failed their exit exam get credit for prior pass on state A's exam): 6 states
- d.. Alternate assessment: 4 states (however, for 3 of these 4 states, this option is only available for special education students)
- e.. Substitute assessment (i.e., ACT, SAT, other common assessments): 6 states
- f.. Waiver or appeal: 9 states
- g.. Alternate diploma: 13 states

For **special education students**, there are additional options (beyond accommodations on the assessment, which are available in every state):

- a.. Exemption/waiver: 6 states
- b.. Alternate assessment: 12 states
- c.. Local or IEP team option to approve alternate grad. reqts or alt. passing score for student: 9 states
- d.. Special diploma or certificate (though this may not carry same weight as standard diploma): 14 states

For **English language learners**, there are fewer options. ELLs are allowed accommodations (as on regular state assessments) but only 2 states have other policies to assist ELLs. According to the CEP report, "Idaho, which is phasing in its ISAT exit exam geared to the tenth grade level for the class of 2008, allows ELLs in the classes of 2006 and 2007 an exemption if they have been enrolled in state schools for less than three years. In 2008 this exemption will no longer be permitted. In Minnesota, exemptions are allowed for ELLs who have been enrolled for less than three years.

"No state allows any alternate routes to a diploma to ELLs that are not open to general education students, nor does any state offer a special diploma specifically for ELLs who cannot pass the exit exam." (page 102 of hard copy, 112 of electronic copy)

**Source:** the August 2005 edition of an annual report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) <http://www.cep-dc.org/highschool/exit/reportAug2005/hseeAug2005.pdf>.

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